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DECISION RECORD

Reference: Environmental Assessment (EA) for Grazing Authorization, #NM-066-99-003

Decision: It is my decision to authorize the issuance of a ten year grazing permit to Bogle Ltd. Company for the Bureau of Land Management grazing allotment #63020.

The permit/lease will be issued as described in the following table.

Number and Kind of Livestock	Animal Units (AU's)	Period	Percent Federal Range	Type Use	Animal Unit Months (AUM's)
4500 sheep	900	yearlong	65%	Active	7020
688 Cattle	688	yearlong	65%	Active	5367
10 Horses	10	yearlong	65%	Active	78
102 Cattle*	102	yearlong	65%	Active*	795
Allotment Total	1700	yearlong	65%	Active	13260

*This active use is Temporary Non-Renewable Use as outlined in a Rangeland Agreement dated 12/15/88. Temporary Non-Renewable use does not appear on grazing permits, however it is authorized by the Rangeland Agreement.

Any additional mitigation measures identified in the environmental impacts sections of the referenced environmental assessment have been formulated into stipulations, terms and conditions.

The environmental assessment has been modified from the version that was issued for public comment. These changes were made due to comments received from the public and other agencies. The changes were to the affected resources section on page 4, the wildlife impacts section on page 7, and a new section was added on page 10 that covers the fundamentals of rangeland health.

If you wish to protest this proposed decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.2, you are allowed 15 days to do so in person or in writing to the authorized officer, after the receipt of this decision. Please be specific in your points of protest. In the absence of a protest, this proposed decision will become the final decision of the authorized officer without further notice, in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.3. A period of 30 days following receipt of the final decision, or 30 days after the date the proposed decision becomes final, is provided for filing an appeal and petition for the stay of the decision, for the purpose of a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge (43 CFR 4.470).
The appeal shall be filed with the office of the Field Office Manager, 2909 West Second, Roswell, NM, 88201, and must state clearly and concisely your specific points.

Signed by T. R. Kreager — 8/9/99
Assistant Field Manager — Date

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
for
GRAZING AUTHORIZATION

ALLOTMENT 63020, SECTION 3

EA-NM-066-99-003

October, 1998

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Roswell Field Office
Roswell, New Mexico

I. Introduction

When authorizing livestock grazing on public range, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has historically relied on a land use plan and environmental impact statement to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). A recent decision by the Interior Board of Land Appeals, however, affirmed that the BLM must conduct a site-specific NEPA analysis before issuing a permit or lease to authorize livestock grazing. This environmental assessment fulfills the NEPA requirement by providing the necessary site-specific analysis of the effects of issuing a new grazing permit/lease on allotment #63020.

The scope of this document is limited to the effects of issuing a 10 year grazing permit, other future actions such as range improvement projects will be addressed in a project specific environmental assessment. There are no current plans for additional management actions on this allotment.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of issuing a new grazing permit would be to authorize livestock grazing on public lands on allotment #63020. The permit would specify the types and levels of use authorized, and the terms and conditions of the authorization pursuant to 43 CFR §§4130.3, 4130.3-1, and 4130.3-2.

B. Conformance with Land Use Planning

The Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (October 1997) has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan's Record of Decision. The proposed action is consistent with the RMP/EIS.

C. Relationships to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans

The proposed action is consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1700 et seq.); the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (43 U.S.C. 315 et seq.), as amended; the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.), as amended; the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1535 et seq.) as amended; the Federal Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (43 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.); Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management and Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands.

Proposed Action and Alternatives

A. Proposed Action:

The proposed action is to authorize Bogle Ltd. Company a grazing permit for the X-Bar ranch as outlined in the following table:

Number and Kind of Livestock	Animal Units (AU's)	Period	Percent Federal Range	Type Use	Animal Unit Months (AUM's)
4500 sheep	900	yearlong	65%	Active	7020
688 Cattle	688	yearlong	65%	Active	5367
10 Horses	10	yearlong	65%	Active	78
102 Cattle*	102	yearlong	65%	Active*	795
Allotment Total	1700	yearlong	65%	Active	13260

*This active use is Temporary Non-Renewable Use as outlined in a Rangeland Agreement dated 12/15/88. Temporary Non-Renewable use does not appear on grazing permits, however it is authorized by the Rangeland Agreement.

B. No Permit authorization alternative:

This alternative would not issue a new grazing permit. There would be no livestock grazing authorized on public land within allotment #63020.

III. Affected Environment

A. General Setting

Allotment #63020 is located in Lincoln county, approximately 20 miles southeast of Corona, New Mexico. The allotment consists of 48,117 acres of public land, 3,796 acres of state land, and 19,596 acres of private land. Within the ranch boundaries are also 40 acres of federal land that lie outside of the BLM Grazing District boundary. This 40 acre tract is assigned a separate allotment number since it is administrated under section 15 of the Taylor Grazing Act, the current grazing lease on the section 15 lands will not expire until the year 2007.

This allotment lies within the boundaries of the Roswell Grazing District established subsequent to the Taylor Grazing Act (TGA). Grazing authorization on Public Lands inside the Grazing District boundary is governed by section 3 of the TGA. Livestock numbers for the ranch are controlled under this section 3 permit, the permittee is billed for the amount of forage available for livestock on federal land. Vegetation monitoring studies are used to determine the allowable number of livestock on the ranch.

The landscape is rolling, grass covered hills dissected by major drainages. The major drainages within this allotment are the Little Hasperos canyon, Hackberry draw, Arroyo del Gallo, Hines draw, and Hogadero draw. More detailed information of the area is discussed under the affected resources section.

The following resources or values are not present or would not be affected: Prime/Unique Farmland, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Minority/Low Income Populations, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Hazardous/Solid Wastes, Wetlands/Riparian Zones. Native American Religious Concerns. Cultural inventory surveys would continue to be required for public actions involving surface disturbing activities.

B. Affected Resources

1. Soils: The X bar ranch covers an expansive area with many soil types. In general, the soils in the area are Pastura-Deama-Darvey series. The soils vary from very shallow to very deep, are well drained, and found on nearly level to moderately sloped areas. The soils are derived predominately from limestone. For in depth soil information, please refer to the Soil Survey of Lincoln County New Mexico, published by the Natural Resource Conservation Service(NRCS). A copy of this publication may be reviewed at the BLM Roswell Field Office or at a local NRCS office.

2. Vegetation: This allotment is within the grassland vegetative community as identified in the Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS). Vegetative communities managed by the Roswell Field Office are identified and explained in the RMP/EIS. Appendix 11 of the draft RMP/EIS describes the Desired Plant Community (DPC) concept and identifies the components of each community. The distinguishing feature for the grassland community is that grass species typically comprises 75% or more of the potential plant community. The community also includes shrub, half-shrub, and forb species. The percentages of grasses, forbs, and shrubs actually found at a particular location will vary with recent weather factors, past resource uses and the potential of the site.

Seventeen rangeland monitoring studies have been in place on this allotment since 1983. 11 monitoring sites are located on shallow CP-2, 5 sites on loamy CP-2, and one site on shallow limestone CP-3 ecological (range) sites. Monitoring was conducted in 1983, 1987, and 1992. The following table summarizes monitoring data for the X Bar allotment:

Monitoring Data Summary, Allotment Averages from 1983 to 1993							
	Grasses	forbs	shrubs	trees	litter	bare ground	rock
Percent composition of vegetative cover	92.66	4.44	2.44	0.44	N/A	N/A	N/A
Percent ground cover	28.91		0.88		14.19	31.43	24.57

Ecological (range) condition and trend	63 condition rating, good condition (from 0-100 scale with 100 rating highest) Static trend

Monitoring data indicates that the vegetative conditions on allotment #63020 achieve the multiple resource objectives established in the Roswell RMP. Livestock stocking levels are within the allowable vegetation utilization range. Monitoring data and analysis are available for review at the Roswell Field Office.

3. Wildlife: This allotment is within the Macho Habitat Management Area, it meets the suitability index for antelope transplants. Antelope transplants have been successfully implemented in the past and they continue to inhabit a large portion of this ranch. The entire ranch is fenced with net-wire. Past management actions such as antelope passes have been taken to improve antelope movement patterns. Other game species occurring within the area include mule deer, mourning dove, and scaled quail. Raptors that utilize the area on a more seasonal basis include the Swainson's, red-tailed, and ferruginous hawks, American kestrel, and great-horned owl. Numerous passerine birds utilize the grassland areas due to the variety of grasses, forbs, and shrubs. The most common include the western meadowlark, mockingbird, horned lark, killdeer, loggerhead shrike, and vesper sparrow.

The warm prairie environment supports a large number of reptile species compared to higher elevations. The more common reptiles include the short-horned lizard, lesser earless lizard, eastern fence lizard, coachwhip, bullsnake, prairie rattlesnake, and western rattlesnake.

A general description of wildlife occupying or potentially utilizing the proposed action area is located in the Affected Environment Section (p. 3-62 to 3-71) of the Draft Roswell RMP/EIS (9/1994).

4. Threatened and Endangered Species: There are no known resident populations of threatened or endangered species on this allotment. A list of federal threatened, endangered, and candidate species reviewed for this EA can be found in Appendix 11 of the Roswell RMP (AP11-2). Of the listed species, avian species such as the bald eagle and peregrine falcon may be observed in the general geographic area during migration or the winter months. There are no known records of these species having occurred on the allotment, and no designated critical habitat areas are within the allotment.

5. Livestock Management: The allotment is operated as a cow/calf, yearling cattle and sheep ranch. The X Bar ranch is an expansive area consisting of 17 pastures and four traps, which aid in livestock movement and restraint. Multiple water wells, pipeline systems and earthen reservoirs provide livestock water throughout the allotment. Rotation of livestock through the pastures is used to promote proper grazing and

vegetation conservation. Precipitation patterns play a role in determining the rotation pattern, dry areas are allowed to rest as much as possible. The allotment operator stays flexible with livestock numbers and maintains conservative stocking rates.

6. Visual Resources: The allotment is located within a Class IV Visual Resource Management area. This means that contrasts may attract attention and be a dominant feature in the landscape in terms of scale. However, the changes should repeat the basic elements of the landscape.

7. Water Quality: No perennial surface water is found on the Public Land on this allotment.

8. Air Quality: Air quality in the region is generally good. The allotment is in a Class II area for the Prevention of Significant Deterioration of air quality as defined in the public Clean Air Act. Class II areas allow a moderate amount of air quality degradation.

9. Recreation: Since this allotment has no facility based recreational activities, only dispersed recreational opportunities occur on these lands. Recreational activities that may occur include hunting, caving, sightseeing, Off Highway Vehicle Use, primitive camping, horseback riding and hiking.

Legal and physical access to public lands within this allotment are through state lands and county maintained roads. Off Highway Vehicle designation for public lands within this allotment are classified as "Limited" to existing roads and trails.

Due to the fact that public land boundaries are not marked adequately or identified by signs and/or fences, the public use of these BLM lands are limited. One of the alleged UFO crash sites of 1947 is located on this allotment. The UFO crash site has been excluded from rights-of-way and mineral leasing. The site will be withdrawn from mining claim location, and designated a NSO for oil and gas leasing.

10. Cave/Karst: This allotment is located within a designated area of High Karst and Cave Potential. Although a complete significant cave or karst inventory has not been completed for the public lands located in this grazing allotment, a significant cave or karst feature is known to exist within this allotment. Monitoring of the Cave/Karst feature will be necessary to determine if protective measures are required in the future.

11. Floodplains: Within this allotment, floodplains exist that are recorded on Federal Emergency Management Agency maps. The identified floodplains are generally the major drainages named in the general setting above. Several miles of water pipelines, fences and roads cross the floodplains.

Environmental Impacts

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action

1. Soils: Proper utilization levels and grazing distribution patterns are expected to retain sufficient vegetative cover on the allotment, this will maintain the stability of the soils. Soil compaction and excessive vegetative use will occur at small, localized areas such as bedding areas, watering locations, and along trails. Positive affects from the proposed action may include acceleration of nutrient cycling, and chipping of the soil crust by hoof action may stimulate seedling growth and water infiltration.

2. Vegetation: Vegetation will continue to be grazed and trampled by domestic livestock as well as other herbivores. The area has been grazed by livestock since the early part of the 1900's, if not longer. The area evolved with large ungulate animal species and native vegetation is accustomed to herbivory. Ecological condition and trend is expected to remain stable and/or improve over the long term with the proposed authorized number of livestock and existing pasture management. Rangeland monitoring data indicates that there is an adequate amount of forage for the multiple resource use objectives.

3. Wildlife: Domestic livestock will continue to utilize vegetative resources needed by a variety of wildlife species for life history functions within this allotment. The magnitude of livestock grazing impacts on wildlife is dependent upon the species of wildlife being considered, and it's habitat needs. In general, livestock stocking rate adjustments have been made in the past that minimize the direct competition for those vegetative resources needed by a variety of wildlife species. Cover habitat for wildlife will remain the same as the existing situation. Maintenance and operation of existing waterings will continue to provide dependable water sources for wildlife, as well as livestock

4. T&E species: Livestock grazing resulting from issuing a grazing lease, may affect, but not likely to adversely affect the bald eagle. It is expected that habitat and range condition would be maintained or improved by authorizing grazing conducive with multiple resource vegetative production goals. Habitat for wintering bald eagles would not be negatively impacted by livestock grazing. There would be no impact to the peregrine falcon since important riparian nesting sites are not found on this allotment.

5 Livestock Management: No adverse impacts are anticipated under the proposed action.

6. Visual Resources The continued grazing of livestock would not affect the form or color of the landscape. The primary appearance of the vegetation within the allotment will remain the same.

7. Water Quality -. Direct impacts to surface water quality would be minor, short-term impacts during stormflow. Indirect impacts to water-quality related resources, such as fisheries, would not occur. The proposed action would not have a significant effect on ground water. Livestock would be dispersed over the allotment, and the soil would filter potential contaminants.

8. Air Quality: Dust levels under the proposed action would be slightly higher than under the no grazing alternative due to allotment management activities. The levels would be within the limits allowed in a Class II area for the Prevention of Significant Deterioration of air quality.

9. Recreation: Grazing should have little or no impact on the dispersed recreational opportunities within this allotment. Public lands are well blocked and accessible via county maintained roads. The evidence or presence of livestock can negatively affect visitors who desire solitude, unspoiled landscape views, or to hike without seeing signs of livestock. However, grazing can benefit some forms or recreation, such as hunting, by creating new water sources for game animals.

10. Caves/Karst: Continued grazing of the allotment may affect significant caves or karst resources if protective measures are not followed. If monitoring determines that significant caves or karst features are being affected by grazing, additional protective measures will be required. The protective measures could include, but are not limited to, the following actions: Fencing sinks, cave entrances or arroyos from multiple-use impacts; removing check-dams, erosion control projects and stock ponds; closing roads; no chemical vegetation removal. The area around significant caves or karst features should be treated sensitively, so no adverse impacts affect the cave or karst feature.

11. Floodplains: Floodplain function does not appear to be significantly affected by the construction of roads, fences or pipelines. Future development will be restricted as much as practical. Because future development will be minimized, differences between alternatives are negligible.

B. Impacts of the No Livestock Grazing Alternative.

1. Soils: Soil compaction would be reduced on the allotment around old trails and bedding grounds, there would be a small reduction in soil loss on the allotment.

2. Vegetation: It is expected that the number of plant species found within the allotment will remain the same, however, there would be small changes in the relative percentages of these species. Vegetation will continue to be utilized by wildlife. There would be an increase in the amount of standing vegetation.

3. Wildlife: Wildlife would have no competition with livestock for forage and cover.

4. T&E Species: There would be no impacts to threatened or endangered species or habitat.

5. Livestock management: The forage from public land would be unavailable for use by the lessee. This would have a significant adverse economic impact to the livestock operation. If the No Grazing alternative is selected, the owner of the livestock would be responsible for ensuring that livestock do not enter Public Land [43 CFR 4140.1(b)(1)]. The intermingled land status on the allotment makes it economically unfeasible to fence out the public land and use only the private land. The remaining private and state land could not support the number of livestock currently authorized and the lower number of livestock would not provide the level of potential income the operator is accustomed to. The allotment operator would also lose the investment made for the acquisition of the permit and improvements installed privately.

6. Visual Resources: There would be no change in the visual resources.

7. Water Quality: There could be a slight improvement in water quality due to the minor reductions in sediment loading during stormflow.

8. Air Quality: There would be a slightly less dust under this under this alternative versus the proposed alternative, but this would be negligible when considering all sources of dust.

9. Recreation: Impacts would be very minor under the alternative. No positive impacts from livestock watering locations would occur.

10. Caves/Karst: Impacts would be the same as the proposed action if no significant caves are found.

11. Floodplains: Impacts would be the same as the proposed action.

V. Cumulative Impacts

All of the allotments that have permits/leases with the BLM will have to go through scoping and analysis under NEPA. Allotment #63020 is surrounded by allotments that will be undergoing this process. If the proposed action is selected, there would be no change in the cumulative impacts since it does not vary from the current situation.

If the no livestock grazing alternative is selected, there would be little change in the cumulative impact as long as the surrounding allotments continue to be stocked at their current level. If the permitted numbers are reduced on the surrounding ranches as well, the economics of the surrounding communities and/or minority/low income populations would be negatively impacted.

The No Grazing alternative was considered, but not chosen in the Rangeland Reform Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Record of Decision (ROD) (p. 28). The elimination of grazing in the Roswell Field Office Area was also considered but eliminated by the Roswell RMP/ROD (pp. ROD-2).

VI. Residual Impacts

Vegetative monitoring studies have shown that grazing, at the current permitted numbers of animals, is sustainable. If the mitigation measures are enacted, then there would be no residual impacts to the proposed action.

VII. Mitigating Measures

Vegetation monitoring studies will continue to be conducted and the permitted numbers of livestock will be adjusted if necessary. If new information surfaces that livestock grazing is negatively impacting other resources, action will be taken at that time to mitigate those impacts.

VIII. Fundamentals of Rangeland Health

The fundamentals of rangeland health are identified in 43 CFR §§4180.1 and pertain to watershed function, ecological process, water quality, and habitat for threatened and endangered (T&E) species and other special status species. Based on the available data and professional judgement, the evaluation by this environmental assessment indicates that the conditions identified in the fundamentals of rangeland health exist on this allotment.

IX. Team Members

Jim Schroeder, John Spain, Tim Kreager, Irene Gonzales-Salas, Jerry Dutchover, Rand French, Pat Flanary, Jerry Ballard, Howard Parmen, Chuck Schmidt.